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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study of 1,053 institutions that revealed several beliefs and trends among chief academic officers about improving undergraduate education. Among the beliefs and trends discovered are the following: (1) most commonly reported academic practices for undergraduate educational improvement were faculty recruitment, selection and promotion processes, and academic planning; the least used were student assessment and academic administrative leadership practices; (2) chief academic officers consider faculty recruitment, selection, and promotion practices the most effective practices at their institutions while the least were those related to instructional development; and (3) two-year colleges are more likely to have recently introduced new academic management practices, comprehensive institutions are more likely to have such practices in place, and four-year institutions are more likely to rate the existing practices as effective. The Academic Management Practices Inventory, developed by the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, is noted for providing the means for identifying the extent and effectiveness of academic management practices on individual campuses. (GLR)

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IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

What Are Academic Administrators Doing to Improve Undergraduate Education?

The management revolution in higher education has now become the academic management revolution. A survey of academic leaders at 1,053 institutions across the United States indicates that most of them have instituted the type of academic management practices you would expect to find in any well-run enterprise. Interest in effective academic management runs high: in the past three years, new practices have been developed in many areas, reflecting the shift from governance, administrative, and financial issues to educational, curricular, and learning issues.

To document this revolution, we asked chief academic administrators two questions: What are the barriers to improving teaching and learning, and, what management practices do you think improve teaching and learning? In an earlier **Accent** ("Administrative Barriers to Improving Undergraduate Education") we discussed the impediments; here, we focus on the practices.

Three questions were asked about practices: whether the institution had them, whether they had been initiated within the past three years, and whether they were perceived to be effective. Responses were solicited on 111 different items, each representing a different academic management practice aimed specifically at improving undergraduate education. These 111 items

were factor analyzed and summarized into fifteen categories, or academic management functions:

Academic Planning

Academic Administrative Leadership

Institutional Academic Governance

Institutional Emphasis on Undergraduate Education

Academic Management Information and Analytic Support Systems

Academic Resource Allocation

Admissions and Enrollment Management

Academic, Curriculum, and Program Policy

Educational Technology and Computers

Faculty Development

Instructional and Teaching Development

Faculty Recruitment, Selection, and Promotion

Assessing and Rewarding Teaching Effectiveness

Student Academic Support Systems

Student Assessment

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What's Happening?

- The management activities cited most often as being in place relate, not surprisingly, to faculty recruitment, selection, and promotion.
- More than three-fourths of the institutions also report that academic planning, educational technology, and an emphasis on undergraduate education are in place.
- Practices least likely to be in place are those related to student assessment.

When we compared public with private institutions, we found similar academic management practices in the majority of the categories. Where there are statistically significant differences,

- Public institutions more frequently indicate having academic management practices in the areas of management information systems, curricular policy, resource allocation, and instructional development.
- Private institutions indicate more practices related to faculty recruitment.

Comparisons among comprehensive, four-year, and two-year institutions indicate a much greater number of differences. Of the fifteen categories, statistically significant differences appeared for thirteen of these categories. Four-year institutions report lower occurrences of academic management practices in more categories than do comprehensive or two-year institutions. The following table shows which type of institution indicated the highest and lowest occurrence of the management practices in the survey.

What's New?

The results of the survey showed that some administrative practice categories are fairly new in higher education. For instance,

- Half the institutions in the survey had instituted practices related to educational technology within the three years prior to the survey.
- Over thirty percent of the institutions had implemented changes in academic planning, enrollment management, instructional development, and student assessment.
- Of all the institutions that already had instructional development practices in place, half had introduced them within the past three years.
- Over two-thirds of those practicing student assessment had instituted it within the last three years.
- Practices that reflected academic leadership, the faculty reward system, academic governance, and faculty recruitment were much less likely to have been initiated recently.

When we compared public with private institutions, we found that the occurrence of new practices is similar for both. The only statistically significant difference occurs in the institutional emphasis on undergraduate education. Although both public and private institutions indicate the same frequency of practices that reflect an emphasis on undergraduate education, these are more likely to have been recently implemented in public institutions, leaving us with the assumption that the emphasis in private institutions is not a new phenomenon.

Existence of Academic Management Practices, by Type of Institution

	Comprehensive	4-yr	2-yr
Academic Planning	—	LO	HI
Academic Leadership	LO	—	HI
Institutional Governance	HI*	HI*	LO
Academic Management Information & Analytical Systems	HI*	LO	HI*
Academic Resource Allocation	HI	LO	—
Admissions & Enrollment Management	HI	LO	—
Curriculum & Program Policies	—	LO	HI
Faculty Development	—	LO	HI
Instructional Development	—	LO	HI
Faculty Recruitment, Selection, & Promotion	LO	HI	—
Assess & Reward Teaching	HI	—	LO
Student Academic Support Systems	HI	—	LO
Student Assessment	LO	—	HI

*Same rankings

When we looked for differences by type of institution, we found few. Over half of the practices recently implemented seem to have been adopted at the same rates, regardless of type of institution. Where differences occurred, we found the following:

- Two-year institutions were more likely to have recently implemented practices related to educational technology, management information systems, student academic support systems, emphasis on undergraduate education, faculty reward systems, and faculty recruitment.
- Two-year institutions were least likely to have newly implemented practices for academic administrative leadership, which is not surprising since they had indicated a higher level of these practices than had other types of institutions.
- Four-year institutions, where emphasis on undergraduate education is high, were less likely to have newly instituted practices in administrative leadership.

What Works?

On the average, chief academic officers rated all of the practices listed as effective at their institutions. Where there were differences, we found:

- In general, college administrators believed that their most effective practices were those related to faculty recruitment and rewards for teaching effectiveness.
- Some practices were rated as less effective than others, with instructional development receiving the lowest ranking.

When we looked at different types of institutions, seven categories (academic planning, academic governance, information systems, faculty development, faculty selection and promotion, rewarding teaching, and student assessment) showed statistically different ratings for effectiveness. In all seven cases, academic administrators at comprehensive institutions gave lower effectiveness ratings to their practices than did administrators at four-year or two-year institutions.

When we compared public and private institutions, private institutions gave higher effectiveness ratings to the academic management practices on which there were statistically significant differences (such as academic planning, academic leadership, faculty selection and promotion, rewarding teaching, and student support systems) than did public institutions.

A combined comparison of public and private institutions by institutional type revealed four categories of practices with statistically significant differences for both, leading one to conclude that four-year, private

institutions find that their faculty recruitment, faculty rewards, emphasis on undergraduate education, and academic planning activities are the most effective.

Summary

In general, the results of this study indicate several beliefs and trends among chief academic officers:

- The most commonly reported academic management practices designed to affect teaching and learning are faculty recruitment, selection, and promotion processes and academic planning. The least used are student assessment and academic administrative leadership practices.
- New practices are more likely to have been introduced in educational technology and academic planning than in the other areas listed.
- Not only are faculty recruitment, selection, and promotion practices reported most often, but chief academic officers consider them the most effective practices at their institutions. The least effective practices in their opinion are those related to instructional development.
- Two-year colleges are more likely to have recently introduced new academic management practices; comprehensive institutions are more likely to have such practices in place; and four-year institutions are more likely to rate the existing practices as effective.
- Although, for the most part, the same practices exist at public and private institutions, the perceived effectiveness of these practices and recent changes in them vary significantly, with private colleges being more likely to view practices as effective.

In general, academic administrators report that there is an extensive set of practices being used in higher education to improve undergraduate teaching and learning, and these practices are considered effective.

The Academic Management Practices Inventory, developed by NCRIPTAL researchers, provides a means for identifying the extent and effectiveness of academic management practices on individual campuses. Once such practices are identified, administrators and faculty can then address the issues raised and explore innovative decision making to ensure that management practices support the teaching and learning process.

—Michele Genthon

This **Accent** is based on the research of Marvin W. Peterson and Kim S. Cameron and the staff of NCRIPTAL's research program on the Organizational Context for Teaching and Learning.

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